

**"Cutting Out the Waste:  
Overview of H.R. 5766, the Government Efficiency Act"**  
*House Committee on Government Reform*  
*July 19, 2006*

**Testimony of Representative Todd Tiahrt**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee today.

As I think you would agree, the President's tax cuts are to be commended for getting our economy moving in a positive direction again. However, the other half of the formula for economic success is to cut wasteful and unnecessary spending. It is certainly no secret that the federal budget is filled with examples of duplicative, inefficient, and failed Federal agencies and programs. I am also very concerned with the outdated systems that remain throughout the federal government – preventing modernization, efficiency, and better response to the American people.

I am here today to discuss legislation that I have introduced with Chairman Davis and Rep. Jon Porter. H.R. 5766, the

Government Efficiency Act (GEA) will eliminate much of the inefficiency and waste, fraud and abuse that persists in our federal government despite the desire of many of our colleagues and current and former Administrations.

### **Spending Concerns**

When Republicans gained control of Congress in 1994, we proposed to eliminate wasteful and deficit spending. For several years, we held to that promise by modestly curtailing spending growth and balancing the budget in 1998 for the first time since the 1960s. Since that time, however, federal spending has jumped drastically and we have returned to a time of massive budget deficits.

Some of this increased spending is understandable — especially in the defense budget, considering the one-two punch of being under-funded by the previous administration and the exigencies of 9/11.

But there are billions of taxpayer dollars that go every year to federal programs and agencies that are redundant, wasteful, and

altogether irrelevant. There are meaningful ways that we can confront the deficit, including by rooting out fraud and abuse in our government.

### **Efficiency Concerns**

Even my colleagues who are not as concerned with the growth in spending and size of the federal government concede that the federal government has gotten too unwieldy to be efficient and is not as responsive as it should be to the public, our constituents. The aftermath of Katrina highlighted not only the failures of local and state government, but also the inadequacy of the federal emergency management system. Most of that is due to outdated procedures, inefficient systems and overlap among agencies. Even tasks that are relatively simple in the private sector, such as tracking products, are lagging in the federal government where FEMA was not sure where supplies were or even how many it had.

We have also seen the negative effect inefficiencies and duplications in worker reemployment programs have on workers

who need retraining. We have tried to fix those, but there is much more to be done government wide.

### **Need for Commission**

It has become increasingly clear that Congress' normal procedures cannot address the inefficiency, spending and waste problems that persist within our federal government.

In addition to parochial interests, Member schedules are so consumed by hearings, constituent meetings and other responsibilities, it is difficult to spend adequate time investigating deep enough in the federal bureaucracy to make meaningful cuts and provide thorough oversight.

Time and again, we see congressionally-authorized programs become institutionalized, ultimately becoming a permanent fixture at the expense of taxpayers. This ties up precious federal resources that could be used toward paying down the national debt or higher Congressional priorities.

Congress is making headway, the House Appropriation Committee did eliminate approximately 52 government programs

last year. However, it was just “the tip of the iceberg.” Some government watchdog groups have conservatively estimated the federal government wastes \$80 to \$100 billion annually.

By cutting out unnecessary Federal programs and agencies, we will send a strong message that we are serious about exercising fiscal responsibility and controlling government spending. With this in mind, I have introduced a bipartisan piece of legislation that will accomplish this very purpose.

Since 1994 many of my colleagues – on both sides of the aisle – and I have worked on waste, fraud and abuse commission proposals.

Since the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, I have introduced CARFA (Commission on Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies). Rep. Brady has worked hard on his Sunset Act. Chairman Davis has held several hearings on this issue in this Committee. Reps Porter, Brown-Waite, Garrett, Wolf, and others have also spoken out about their ideas for addressing these concerns.

## GEA

This year I have worked with Leadership, the Government Reform Committee, Rep. Brady, and Members across the political spectrum on a bill to meet the concerns of waste, fraud, abuse and inefficiency in the federal government. A first step toward a stable financial future for this country and a streamlined, efficient federal government can be found in H.R. 5766, the Government Efficiency Act (GEA).

H.R. 5766 will

“provide for the establishment of Federal Review Commissions to review and make recommendations on improving the operations, effectiveness, and efficiency of Federal programs and agencies, and to require a schedule for such reviews of all Federal agencies and programs.”

GEA provides a framework for a disciplined government-wide review process by Federal Review Commissions.

Congress will have to vote on the Federal Review Commission's recommendations, the Committee(s) of jurisdiction will have time to review the report but there will be a time clock and the

Committee must report its findings in 30 days. The congressional log-rolling that normally bogs down the process will be short-circuited. Commission reports cannot die in committee. GEA further ensures a vote on the floor of the House. While amendments will be allowed, Congress will take commission reports seriously. In this way, real reform can emerge, and the deficit and debt problems can be brought under control.

H.R.5766 offers Congress and the Administration a unique opportunity: rather than simply re-fund and increase funding for every federal program, GEA will eliminate unproductive, duplicative and outdated programs.

Here's how the Federal Review Commissions would work: Either a Congressional Joint Resolution or Executive Order can establish a Federal Review Commission. A bipartisan Commission would consist of 7 members, 3 appointed by the President and 4 in consultation with the majority and minority leadership of the House and Senate. Members would be appointed for the life of the

Commission. The Commission's duties would then include conducting a top to bottom review of all federal programs and agencies. The Commission would seek to identify those programs or agencies that could be considered duplicative in mission, grossly wasteful or inefficient, outdated, irrelevant, or failed. Within a year of its establishment, the Commission would be required to submit to the President and Congress a plan with recommendations of the agencies and programs that should be realigned or eliminated and propose legislation to implement this plan. GEA would require congressional consideration of the review's findings under expedited legislative rules. In short, Congress would be voting "up or down" to continue or stop wasteful spending.

Under the framework of GEA, more than one Federal Review Commission could be established. GEA does not specify what areas the Federal Review Commission must target – everything is on the table. The Joint Resolution or Executive Order authorizing a Federal Review Commission would outline the scope of the Commission review.

## **Need for GEA**

GEA's main focus is to make our government smarter and more efficient, and also to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not used to support programs such as the "Federal Tea-taster," who until 1995 headed the "Board of Tea Experts" which was created by the Imported Tea Act of 1897. Until this program's elimination just 10 short years ago, the federal government was spending \$120,000 in salary and operating expenses per year to taste tea. Obviously this is only one example of the type of programs that Federal Review Commissions would target, but we know that our federal government is replete with programs such as this that make a mockery out of the hard-earned tax dollars that Congress provides.

Other examples of government waste that Federal Review Commissions could target include surplus lands owned by the Department of Energy, which if sold would save taxpayers \$12 million over five years. We could save \$1 million dollars every year by simply eliminating overlapping responsibilities and

reducing administrative positions at the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The examples of inefficient and wasteful government practices that could be targeted are far too numerous to cite in this short amount of time. However, it is clear to me that the need for GEA is very real.

The strict time limits governing the Commission, which would expire shortly after submitting its findings, would ensure that its costs are kept to a minimum. I believe that the savings that would occur as a result of the Commission's findings will more than justify the minimal expenses that the study might incur. In addition, it is worth noting that GEA requires that ALL funds saved by the implementation of this plan can ONLY be used for paying down the federal deficit.

### Conclusion

H.R.5766 offers Congress and the Administration a test: Can we address a real and present problem by adopting a method that has been successful in the past?

An independent commission with no natural constituency would be able to objectively review the federal government. The commission could not only determine whether it makes sense for multiple agencies to provide the same service; it can recommend which agency is most efficient in providing the service. While I wish I could say Congress can provide this same oversight, reality indicates otherwise.

GEA is a realistic plan that will make genuine reform possible. I encourage this Committee to support to this viable solution to government waste and inefficiency.

If the GEA commission comes to fruition, it will give Congress arms-length distance to do the right thing and vote down ridiculous, redundant and outdated programs. Over fifty of our colleagues in the House have agreed to co-sponsor this legislation and our numbers are growing stronger. We hope to see the GEA

commission hard at work targeting waste, fraud and abuse by this time next year, if not sooner.

“This bill is a victory for those of us who have worked more than a decade in trying to establish a waste, fraud and abuse commission. It is a workable compromise that gets us one step closer to realizing a long-term vision. It is not perfect, but it is a giant leap forward in cutting government spending, and that is a victory worth waiting for.

Thank you for your time.